1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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453 434 556 worker receives about ten gourdes a week, in addition to his food, and the work often is of several months' duration. To do this, however, it is necessary for him to hire another to work his own garden for the period he is thus engaged. As extra [454] money is gradually accumulated, more land is purchased, so that the returns become greater; and the process is accelerated when, upon the death of a man's father, other family land is added to what he already owns.

437 454 556 Thus the drive to obtain property is an obsession with the Haitian peasant. The question of a few centimes, to say nothing of a gourde, is hotly argued; for instance, in the bidding for unclaimed lost animals held periodically at the Mairie in Mirebalais, bids are often raised by as little as five centimes, with the bidder waiting until the last possible moment, the third call of the auctioneer, before pledging the additional sum. Those who have money prefer silver to paper and usually keep it in a trunk at home, but if troublous times impend, the money is put in jars and hidden in the ground. In this way it happens that when a man dies, much of his money is lost to his heirs, for he rarely tells even his wife or children what he has done with it.

556 Yet this point must be stressed — in the mind of the Haitian peasant, though wealth is desired for the prestige it gives, it is rarely prized for the display it permits. Frequently when a person of large means is pointed out in the market place, he will be simply if not poorly dressed. To make undue display of possessions would arouse envy, and envy brings upon a man's household the evil eye. Wealth is rather manifested in extensive farms, in elaborate ceremonies for the rituals held for family ancestors and for family gods, in the education of children to the end that they may eventually move to the capital and there attain social and political position of importance. Wealth brings prestige to its owner through the word-of-mouth comment of his neighbors, and with this he is content,

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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the newcomer persists in retaining the place, an informal appeal is taken to the local magistrate, who invariably settles the matter by deciding in favor of the original occupant.

Each woman tends to specialize in certain commodities, such as meat or cloths or notions or baskets. The venders of foodstuffs, other than meat, however, vary their offerings with the season. This latter class of sellers mainly comprises women who, living in the town, constitute a group of "middlemen," either buying produce at the country markets, or, going off with their pack animals into the back country, return with saddle-bags loaded with the purchases they have made direct from the farmer.[2]

Country women are also well represented among the traders, and as they come streaming into town on market days with their head burdens, or driving the heavily laden, slow-plodding donkeys, they fill the streets with color and movement that make up one of the most picturesque aspects of Mirebalais life. A load may consist of one type of produce only, or a woman may bring rice, maize, beans, and bananas, as well as home-made brooms and baskets. All transactions in the market are for cash, and there is no barter of any kind, for the pattern of a money economy has been too deeply lodged in Haitian tradition to allow any other mode of exchange. Prices are based on supply and demand rather than on any agreement between sellers, since contact with the capital causes the current prices paid there for all kinds of produce to be generally known. Another factor which enters into price-fixing, however, is prestige. It is regarded as a mark of incompetence for a woman, whether from country or town, to return home with unsold produce, and since the reputation of being a clever trader is highly valued, this is avoided when at all possible, and the vender adjusts her prices as the day wears on to insure that she will dispose of everything she has brought.

In Mirebalais, as elsewhere, the markets are best attended during harvest months, when by official count as many as

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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family on an average, at 5 persons, husband, wife, and three children, we arrive at the conclusion, that the head of every third family in the state is engaged in cultivating his own freehold; a proportion of independent proprietors, such as perhaps scarcely any other country in the world can exhibit. The number of acres cultivated by these small proprietors, varies from 9 to 30; many of them keep horses, cows, and goats: they raise sufficient provisions of the bread kind, such as yams, plantains, and bananas, for the main support of their families; they kill hogs for meat, and they dispose of their coffee, cotton, hemp, castor oil, and fruit, at the public market for money, to purchase clothing, furniture, and other necessaries. The houses they live in, though poorly furnished, are decent habitations; and many of them have gardens attached, neatly fenced in with bamboo, or with logwood, or aloe hedges.[55]

If these figures are even approximately accurate, the majority of the people of Haiti had not yet become peasants in the sense of being landowners, for in the statement cited only a third of the people owned their land. Another large group, however, possibly a third of the population, were squatters, living on land which technically belonged to someone else but from which they were never ejected. The remaining third, excluding the town and village dwellers, were in the intermediate stage between hirelings and peasants. Some worked for a given rate of wages, but the larger number worked for shares of the produce on the land of large proprietors.

The crop-sharing system (Americans of the twentieth century call it share-cropping) of the 'thirties and 'forties was an automatic but temporary adjustment worked out in perfect disregard of the Code Rural. In general, two arrangements prevailed. By one the laborers worked in return for half the total produce of the estate, raising food for themselves in gardens provided by the owner; under the other they worked for a quarter of the produce, the proprietor guaranteeing to keep them in provisions. There was no general concurrence in Haiti at the time as to which plan was the more economical to the laborer and his family. Certainly both schemes were prejudicial to large crops of coffee and sugar, and therefore to the economic prosperity of the proprietors and the state; since this was so, the crop-sharing expedient was short-lived. Workers participating in it lived in the huts and cabins which, under the old régime, had been inhabited by their slave ancestors. As these fell to pieces others, cheaper and less soundly built, were constructed to take their place.

The crop-sharing system, economically debilitating though it was,

55. *Ibid.*

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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under Toussaint. The ravages of warfare were partially repaired, so that commerce once again appeared at the seaports. English, American, Danish, Swedish, and German vessels now shared what once the French had monopolized. Toussaint's export duties of ten per cent on sugar, coffee, cotton, and cacao were kept by Dessalines, and import duties likewise remained just about the same as formerly: twelve per cent.

A strange stopgap trading scheme was devised. Dessalines named the specific ports at which foreign ships might enter, then established a number of Haitian "consignees" at each of these ports. Numbers were given to each of these men. The first ship which entered the harbor was consigned to the shop of the trader having Number 1, the second to Number 2, and so on until each consignee had dealt with a foreigner, when Number 1 would receive the right to a second ship's cargo.[3] The captain of a vessel sent to Haiti did not know until his arrival in port who would be his consignee. If the probity of the Haitian merchant to whom fate assigned the captain did not inspire confidence, he was not obliged to sell goods to him—but was prohibited from selling them thereafter anywhere else in the country.

In this system there was room for every sort of irregularity and graft. More often than not Dessalines gave the assignments to his favorites, this to a military leader, that to an administrative officer, the other to some simple citizen whom he wished to reward. Often two ships would appear on the horizon at the same time: a consignee would then rush to the officer of the port and promise him half or a quarter of his commission if he would assign the more important of the vessels to his own number; the officer would then order the richer vessel in first.

Violent discontent arose over this system, which meant great profit to the beneficiaries of the monopoly and nothing to those excluded from it. As usual under a rigid system, means were found to evade the monopoly. Foreign ship captains found it well worth their while to sell clandestinely to individuals not high in the favor of the Emperor. This smuggling increased, the captains being both ingenious and adaptable to the needs of their dealers; sometimes the trade was wholesale, sometimes retail. Naturally enough, the Emperor imposed heavy fines on the smuggling operations when detected, but the illicit trade did not cease.

3. This mode of consignment was sanctioned by a decree of Dessalines on September 6, 1805.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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175 433 Haiti under Dessalines seemed to be flourishing, although it was less productive than under the French colonial régime. This was partly because the material damage of the wars had been too great to be quickly repaired; partly it was because many of the free Haitians had discovered ways of disappearing into the remote valleys, there to live the life of independent squatters, safe from the blows of Dessalines' overseers. Tables of exports showed that sugar production was rapidly declining, and that coffee was now becoming the principal crop of the country.[4] Many cane fields, indeed, were turning into rugged thickets, their mills and refineries falling to ruins beside the clogged irrigation ditches.

175 466 439 579 It was a bewildering "system," then, this instituted by Dessalines: intense activity of serfs on government plantations, but an increasing number of deserting squatters; foreign trade encouraged, yet run by principles of local favoritism. Even the old-fashioned practice of piracy was reëstablished, for the Emperor gave letters of marque to some of his subjects who owned ships, allowing them to pursue French and Spanish vessels as the rightful prey of an enemy country. Sometimes these Haitian corsairs even disturbed smaller English merchant ships. Finally, it was Dessalines who said to his favorites, "*Plumez la poule* [that is, the Haitian people], *mais prenez garde qu'elle ne crie pas.*"

175 439 ● 437 Christophe, upon his accession to power in the North, completely abandoned the fantastic schemes of Dessalines for putting an end to all contact between Haitians and foreigners. Among his earliest acts were efforts to undo the economic measures of the Emperor. In his first address he proclaimed certain free ports, announcing that the flags of all nations would be respected and property protected.[5] Next he abolished the consignment system of trading, allowing all foreign traders free access to Haitian merchants. This open system did away with the need of smuggling.

175 439 648 Because Christophe was almost pathetically anxious to make a good impression upon Great Britain, he was scrupulous in living up to his promises of security of property and justice in commercial dealings—to British merchants. The United States fared ill at the King's hands, for it was a young republic which had by refusing

4. See note on this chapter, p. 320, section 4.

5. His constitution of 1807 likewise makes this promise: "The government solemnly guarantees to foreign merchants the security of their persons and property."